

Investigation

A deputy medical examiner investigates all deaths reported to the Medical Examiner's Office. The deputy medical examiners are neither police officers nor physicians, but have received training in medical-legal death investigation.

The deputy medical examiner gathers information about the decedent. This includes background information, such as name, address, date of birth, and details regarding the decedent's medical and social history. This information is used to make decisions regarding any actions to be taken. The deputy will obtain the name and telephone number of the deceased's next of kin or person who has power of attorney for health care.

In some cases, the deputy medical examiner is the person who will notify you of a loved one's death. Attempts will be made to identify the decedent before you are contacted. In some cases, the deputy may need to ask the decedent's family or friends to assist in making identification.

Decisions that need to be made soon after a death include selection of a funeral home and wishes regarding organ donation. If you know this information, please inform the deputy medical examiner.

If during your conversation with a deputy medical examiner you have questions, do not hesitate to ask. You can also call the Medical Examiner's Office if you have any questions later.

Terms

- **Autopsy:** Examination of the organs and tissues to identify diseases and injuries to determine the cause and manner of death.
- **Cause of Death:** The disease or injury that ultimately leads to a person's death. (e.g. stroke or heart attack)
- **Histology:** The study of the microscopic structure of tissues.
- **Forensic Pathology:** A medical specialty that focuses on the nature and cause of diseases and trauma and their relationship to legal issues.
- **Manner of Death:** The circumstance surrounding a death, classified into one of the following categories: natural, accident, suicide, homicide, undetermined, or pending. A pending manner of death may be listed on a death certificate until an investigation is complete.
- **Toxicology:** The study of drugs, chemicals, and poisons and their effect on the body. Common tests included alcohol, over-the-counter and prescription medications, and illegal drugs.

Waukesha County

Medical Examiner's Office



515 West Moreland Blvd.

Waukesha, Wi 53188

(262) 548-7575

Office Hours:

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday - Friday

The Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office

The death of a loved one is often a difficult and confusing time. You may have to speak with doctors, nurses, fire department personnel, ambulance crews, police officers, and funeral directors, in addition to notifying family and friends. In some cases you may also speak with a representative of the Medical Examiner's Office.

This brochure was created to answer some of the most commonly asked questions about the Medical Examiner's Office. Words and terms defined elsewhere in this brochure are *italicized*.

The Medical Examiner's Office is the department responsible for determining the *cause and manner of death* of people who die as a result of circumstances which occurred in Waukesha County. Staff from this office take reports of deaths and respond to scenes 24 hours a day every day of the year. The Medical Examiner's Office is not part of any law enforcement agency or hospital, although we do often work these agencies.

You may speak with a deputy medical examiner who is responsible for investigating deaths. The deputy will gather information about the deceased that may be useful to determine the *cause and manner of death*. Depending on the circumstances surrounding death, the decedent may be released to a funeral home or take the person to the Medical Examiner's Office.

Reportable Deaths

Wisconsin State Statutes mandate that deaths under the following situations be reported to the Medical Examiner's Office.

- Homicides and suicides.
- Deaths following accidents, even if the injury is not the cause of death.
- Deaths due to poisoning.
- Deaths following abortion.
- Deaths with unexplained, unusual, or suspicious circumstances.
- Deaths involving motor vehicles, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, and boats.
- Deaths with no physician or accredited spiritual healer in attendance 30 days preceding death.
- When after reasonable efforts, the physician cannot be obtained or will not, or cannot sign the death record in time or in an emergency situation as determined by the coroner/medical examiner.

In addition, the Medical Examiner's Office is contacted for deaths which occur at home, in which the person was not currently enrolled in an accredited hospice program.

Autopsy

In certain situations, the circumstances surrounding a person's death may require further examination. An *autopsy* may be performed to understand these circumstances and to establish the *cause and manner of death*. Not every death reported to the Medical Examiner's Office requires an autopsy.

If it is determined that an autopsy is necessary, the deceased is taken to the Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office. A physician who specializes in *forensic pathology* performs an autopsy at the Medical Examiner's Office.

During an autopsy the pathologist examines and documents evidence of the person's medical conditions. Samples of blood, urine, or other fluids may be sent for *toxicological* testing. Also, the physician may undertake a *histological* examination.

The Medical Examiner will determine the *cause and manner* of death for the person based upon all the information available.

An autopsy will not interfere with any funeral services you may arrange, including visitation.